

The Voice of the VENDORS:

Futures in School Library Automation, Part 2

WITHOUT question, library automation is changing. Technological developments will soon provide flexibility to school library media specialists that they previously only dreamed about, not to mention features that will facilitate the handling of current and future technologies. This article—Part 2 of

my two-part series on a group of library systems vendors that work with K-12—reflects interviews with vendors who work with a wide range of library environments: Mandarin

Library Automation, The Library Corporation (TLC), Innovative Interfaces, and Sirsi Corporation were asked to talk about current and future developments in library automation (see Figure 1 on page

26). (See also “The Voice of the Vendors: Futures in School Library Automation, Part 1” in the May/June 2005 issue of *MMIS*, which covers my conversations with Follett, Sagebrush, Companion Corp., and Dynix.)

There are many new and exciting enhancements coming for library automation.

Mandarin is excited about the acceptance of Oasis, its new centralized, Web-based automation system. The interface is intuitive; the appearance and features can be tailored to each library. Oasis is a seamless upgrade from Mandarin M3.

Sirsi, whose automation product is Unicorn, has Rooms/Enterprise Portal Solution in beta testing. Rooms/EPs allows media specialists to build “rooms” filled with resources relevant to specific topics or audiences.

Other enhancements include extended bar code validation and smart card systems that provide debit abilities for paying fines and other district fee-based services. Also coming soon is LDAP (Lightweight Directory Access Protocol) authentication, which will allow a single



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COMPANY	PRODUCT
Mandarin Library Automation www.mlasolutions.com	Oasis, Mandarin 3
The Library Corporation (TLC) www.tlcdelivers.com	Library Solution, Library Solution for Schools
Innovative Interfaces, Inc. www.iii.com	Millennium, Via
Sirsi Corp. www.sirsi.com	Unicorn

Figure 1

sign-on to a district system and access to multiple resources without multiple logins. (For more on an early Sirsi Rooms implementation, see "Cherry Hill Public Library's Digital Community Center—Reaching Out to the Schools and Beyond," by Manuel Paredes, in the March/April 2005 issue of *MMIS*.)

VIEWS INTO THE FUTURE

During the interviews, a recurring theme emerged. The automation companies identified the need to focus on the immediate needs of the customers and not attempt to predict too far out what those needs may be. With rapid changes in technology, it is difficult to be sure that what is being planned as the next project is the right one.

TLC sees the future tied to its partnership approach with its district customers. TLC is focused on the customization of TLC products to meet individual customer needs as they arise. Likewise, Innovative Interfaces focuses on solutions for the problems that are brought to them. It sees Web services and wireless as being part of the near future demand.

Mandarin expects to continue offering, upgrading, and supporting M3 and Oasis products. Oasis is envisioned as a global automation system. Unicode capability allows Oasis to display in any language, including Hebrew, Chinese, and Japanese.

Sirsi anticipates increasingly transparent interactions between integrated library systems and other information resources/systems relevant to K-12. Current and emerging standards and protocols will lead to an increasingly integrated IT framework in which all resources available to a school district interact with each other. Sirsi believes library users are interested in both the perceived convenience of sources such as Google as well as more reliable sources (e.g., juried periodical indices) in a context that makes result sets more manageable.

AUTOMATION COSTS

Aware that school districts are increasingly concerned with containing and reducing costs, all of the vendors have taken measures to provide improvements to their automation systems that decrease user costs. Cost savings are accomplished in ease-of-use features that result in reduced training costs, more efficient systems that allow school staff to be more productive, 24/7/365 technical support and improved documentation without added fees, and more reliable systems that require less local technical support time. Most automation systems also allow customers to purchase base systems with the option to add on advanced features as needed.

TLC places itself in the cost range of Follett Destiny and Sagebrush InfoCentre (see the sidebar that updates the information from last issue on Sagebrush's new product, InfoCentre). The TLC Library Solution automation system is Oracle-based. Since TLC directly administers its automation system, district technology staff can focus on other supports needs.

Mandarin has shifted focus to being more service-based and is helping school district libraries and small libraries in a unique manner by providing M3 as a free download through their site. The requested Annual Service and Update Agreement for M3 costs \$575 and provides libraries with 24/7/365 technical support, updates and documentation, access to Customer's Corner on its Web site, membership to discussion lists, and more. M3 seamlessly upgrades to Mandarin's fully featured Oasis system.

EASE OF USE AND TRAINING

Simplified interfaces, contextual help, and Web-based training are being offered by most automation systems. In addition, automation vendors are constantly seeking ways to increase effective and efficient use features.

Sirsi's WorkFlows staff client allows local users to build toolbars of commonly used functions, eliminating features that are rarely or never accessed. The customized toolbars allow more efficient work environments.

TLC is "automating" automation through SIF (Schools Interoperability Framework) interfaces to district student data and providing MARC authority control as part of the installation process. New records are auto-validated first by using the local authority file, then, as needed, via national files. Authority files are updated nightly, and the librarian has the option to allow auto updates or to review the updates before accepting them.

CHANGES IN THE FIELD OF LIBRARY AUTOMATION

The narrowing of the vendor field seems to be viewed by the vendors I talked with as having a positive effect for all libraries. There is still healthy competition keeping vendors actively developing new products to meet the new needs of libraries. There is, however, a need for consumers to be careful in making a vendor choice. Stability and longevity in the field mean a lot in today's market.

Consortia and statewide library cooperative systems are a growing phenomenon. All of the vendors interviewed for this article are actively involved in working to meet the needs of consortia. As a result of continued consortia growth, library vendors are being forced to look at changes in pricing and licensing. Sirsi mentioned they have found customers to be quite proactive in suggesting areas for review.

The use of MARC records to link to electronic resources is making some impact in the library automation world. Sirsi has a "checkout" interface in beta testing for book (and e-book) vendor BWI's e-books that allows patrons to check out BWI materials without having to log in separately to BWI. This convention also means that BWI e-book checkouts will be included with normal circulation statistics without a need to load statistics from a third party. BWI predominantly publishes children's books, so this is of particular interest to the K-12 market.

Other vendors are also improving functionality to handle the use of electronic resources via the library automation system. Innovative Interfaces Web-bridge is one of those improvements. There seems to be an acknowledgment that XML and other formats will be playing a part in resource description in the near future as the demands move beyond the capabilities of MARC.

Partnerships for better resource management and access are growing. As schools purchase more products to be managed through the automation system, the vendors want to provide the interfaces needed. Federated searching, resource resolvers, resource reservations and advanced scheduling, and printing controllers are just some of the currently available and soon-to-be available additions.

DIGITAL OBJECT MANAGEMENT

Chances are you are working with many digital objects on a daily basis. These digital objects are photographs, documents, and other items in digital form. As digitalization of data increases, the need for digital object management (DOM) will press libraries to find efficient methods for retrieval. Talking with the vendors about their developments in digital object management was exciting. As an intermediary step to full

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DOM, libraries and museums are using the MARC 856 field for accessing digital documents.

As an example, the Bay County, Fla., public library's local history site provides access to the Bay County Digitized Photo Archive [<http://www.nwrls.lib.fl.us/localhistory/index.html>]. The photo archive is indexed via the library's TLC automation system utilizing the MARC 856 field to electronically link patrons to the archive.

DOM has already started to impact library automation vendors, and Mandarin feels DOM is the future of libraries. For libraries to continue providing important services to the public, digital information will need to be stored in an efficient, easy-to-access and cost-effective format.

DOM requires a management system, indexing, metadata creation, and an online interface. Sirsi's Hyperion is a Digital Media Archive product that combines with a full-text indexing engine to allow complete searching of digitized documents. Sirsi's new Digital Heritage Room product, to be released at the end of 2005, expands DOM concepts further by allowing additional user-friendly ways to search and display digitized collections. Additional interfaces geared toward allowing users with minimal training to assist in the creation of digital collections are expected in the future.

Innovative Interfaces' Millennium automation system interfaces with Millennium Access Plus (MAP). MAP is made up of three independent components: WebBridge, MetaFind, and Web Access Management. MAP provides libraries with tools to manage and control access to all of their information resources by providing contextual linking, multi-protocol metasearching, and authentication.

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UPDATE TO PART I

In Part I of this article (automation vendors; May/June 2005), I noted:

Sagebrush is nearing release of ... a decentralized solution (where the individual libraries maintain control) with the option to have centralized infrastructure. This new release combines the best of Sagebrush Spectrum and Sagebrush Athena systems. Recognizing that centralization is not for every district and site, Sagebrush is giving schools and districts more options. They are focusing on making the technology system easier to implement and maintain and on controlling hardware costs.

By the time you read this, Sagebrush will have unveiled that enhancement to Athena and Spectrum, Sagebrush InfoCentre, at the ALA conference in Chicago. I spoke to the company at press time to learn about InfoCentre and will take this opportunity to briefly update the May/June article with the following:

New InfoCentre features include:

- Allowing the purchaser to determine when or whether to centralize
- Ability to run multiple stand-alone systems from one server
- Windows, Mac OS X, and Novell compliance
- Configuring to search single collection, all collections, or a subset of collections
- Generation of customizable reports in a "drag-and-drop" environment
- Displaying of MARC records side-by-side for comparison between existing and new records
- Compliance with existing bar codes and scanning hardware

Features previously marketed as add-ons have been integrated into InfoCentre, including:

- zServer/Z39.50 server and client—allows searching and downloading MARC records and Web access to your catalog
- Patron Porter—transfer of student data from district management system
- WebConnect/WebLink—provides Web and electronic resource access from search stations
- Web Catalog—browser-based catalog searching
- Visual Search—icon button searching
- E-Learning Training

BIOMETRICS AND RFID

Biometrics is the use of unique body parts, such as a finger print or a retina scan, for identification. This identification process is beginning to be seen in a number of environments, but it is slow in being accepted in schools. As I talked with the vendors, I found all were ready to provide this service when schools wanted it. Few provided specific thoughts about the implementation process.

Sirsi believes smart cards and other biometrics will be an area of growth. The company anticipates that, in the K-12 setting, there will be discussions about advantages versus potential threats to student privacy, depending on where and how biometric data is collected and stored.

TLC sees the use of thumbprints starting in the cafeteria and moving to the library. To protect privacy, TLC sees a local server storing thumbprint points or bridges rather than the actual prints.

RFID (Radio Frequency Identification) uses electronic devices, such as microchip tags, tag readers, computer servers, and software, to automate library transactions. I asked the vendors what experiences or discussions they had had concerning the use of RFID. The vendors recognized the growth of this technology and its practical application to libraries. Using low-power RFID tags will protect patron privacy because the readers must be in very close proximity to the tag in order to be read. RFID will speed both material checkout and check-in by allowing the scanning of multiple items at one time. Envision a full book return bin being scanned intact and moved away from the circulation desk for sorting and shelving. RFID will also allow location of misshelved items using a handheld scanner tuned to the missing item's tag and walking the collection. RFID continues to be debated within the library community. For more information, check the American Library Association RFID Web site at <http://www.ala.org/ala/oif/ifissues/rfid.htm>.

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